**Member of secret WWII Navajo Code Talker Marine unit dies at 90**

*By Ron Recinto |* [*The Lookout*](http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/lookout/)*– Fri, Nov 2, 2012*

*Photo: Navajo Code Talker George Smith (Paul Natonabah/Navajo Times)*

A member of the famed Navajo Code Talkers, who used their rare and ancient language to outwit the Japanese during World War II, has died.

George Smith died on Oct. 30 at the Gallup Indian Medical Center in New Mexico, said Navajo Nation president Ben Shelly. Smith was 90.

"Our Navajo Code Talkers have been real life heroes to generations of Navajo people," Shelly [said in a statement](http://www.president.navajo-nsn.gov/?p=557" \t "_blank). "They have brought pride to our Navajo people in so many ways."

In honor of Smith, the Navajo Nation flag will be flown at half-staff until sundown on Nov. 4. Smith was part of a Marine unit of Native Americans who created a complex and secret code based on the Navajo language. Because Navajo is an unwritten language that was passed through generations, it is difficult for a non-Navajo speaker to translate, [according to navajocodetalkers.org.](http://www.navajocodetalkers.org/" \t "_blank) The words of the code, which were committed to memory by the Code Talkers, were used in communications in key battles, such as Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima, the official site of the Code Talkers notes. The Japanese never managed to [crack the code](http://www.cnn.com/2012/11/01/us/navajo-code-talker-dies/index.html?npt=NP1" \t "_blank).

The 2002 movie ["Windtalkers"](http://movies.yahoo.com/movie/windtalkers/" \t "_blank) starring Nicolas Cage is based on the Code Talkers' mission.

The identities of the Code Talkers were kept secret, even to friends and family, until 1968. Now only a handful are living, according to navajocodetalkers.org.

Smith enlisted with the Marines in 1943. He achieved the rank of corporal while serving in World War II in the Pacific Theater. He fought in battles at Siapan, Tinian, and the Ryukyu Islands, and served in places such as Hawaii and Japan. The Code Talkers and the secret code they developed saved countless lives and helped end the war. After his service, Smith worked as a heavy equipment mechanic with Navajo Engineering Construction Authority."Code Talker Smith led an honorable life. He served his country, then provided for his family," Shelly said.

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